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Peace Reigns at L.A. Fiesta of 300,000

■ **Cinco de Mayo:** Heavy family presence, security efforts contribute to calm.

By FRANK B. WILLIAMS
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Proving last year's violence an aberration, hundreds of thousands of Latinos from all over the Southland gathered Downtown on Sunday for L.A. Fiesta Broadway, celebrating Cinco de Mayo in day-long festivities without a hint of trouble.

Despite overcast skies, police estimated that about 300,000 people showed up at the sixth annual street fair, the largest Cinco de Mayo celebration in the country.

Police fielded about 650 plain-clothes and patrol officers for the event, 150 more than last year. Organizers worked with law enforcement officials to ensure that problems such as 1994's mini-riot

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CAROLYN COLE / Los Angeles Times

Francisco Salinas and Leticia Mendez, left, among dancers at fiesta.

Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/xjpn0004

California and the West

Sports Teams Gain Upper Hand With Cities

■ **Franchises:** San Diego's $60 million in concessions to keep Chargers illustrates growing trend. But city can benefit too.

By MICHAEL GRANBERRY
TIMES STAFF WRITER

SAN DIEGO—It was on the heels of their first appearance in the Super Bowl that the San Diego Chargers announced in February that their home, Jack Murphy Stadium, would be expanded from 60,000 to 72,000 seats—thus ensuring that the team would remain here until the year 2020.

At a time when the fate of their National Football League neighbors—the Rams and the Raiders—was hanging fire, the Chargers managed to win more than $60 million in concessions from their host city, which gets to keep them for another 25 years.

As if San Diego needed reminders of its concern, the Rams—a fixture in Los Angeles for decades—suddenly made good on their threat to leave and bolted for St. Louis. And although the NFL has discussed building a new stadium for the Raiders near Hollywood Park, the fate of Al Davis' team now, as always, remains a question mark.

Whether the threat is implied or real, professional sports teams are using the possibility of leaving to extract better-than-average deals in a free-market economy that is clearly stacked in their favor.

San Diego is only one example of what has become something of a big-city phenomenon. That trend is coupled with the increasing desire of baseball and football franchises to have separate stadiums and mounting pressure for cities to build large indoor arenas, as well.

In San Diego, a city that the National Basketball Assn. has abandoned *twice*, the mere thought of another team leaving is viewed as a civic concern.

"The only way to get and keep major league sports franchises in this day and age is to subsidize them. It's as simple as that," said Roger Noll, professor of economics at Stanford University. "There are so many cities willing to court them, and many fewer franchises than cities who want them."

The most recent chapter was played out several weeks ago, when Art Modell, owner of one of the most storied franchises in professional football, the Cleveland Browns, hinted at moving to Orange County

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LUIS SINCO / For The Times

A child is passed to the front of a crowd gathered to watch fiesta performers Sunday at the event's main stage at Olympic Boulevard and Broadway.

FIESTA: 300,000 Celebrate on Downtown Streets

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would not happen again.

Last year, gang members—infuriated that a stage show was canceled because of overcrowding—threw bottles and rocks, injuring 18 people, including six police officers. The festival was shut down early because of the melee.

Police vowed before Sunday's festival that gang members would not be allowed to start trouble.

"The gang CRASH unit identified gang members before they came in," Police Sgt. Charles Mealey said. "But though we know who they are, we can't keep anybody out because of the way they dress."

Mealey said the heavy presence of families with small children contributed to Sunday's festive calm, a marked contrast with the large, roving pockets of young people who caused trouble last year.

Broadway, like several other streets in the 36-block festival area, was closed to traffic, but it was nearly impassable in many places as wide-eyed teen-agers and families with baby strollers stopped to eat *carnitas* and drink *horchata* and pick up free gifts at dozens of corporate booths.

Many had been drawn by hopes of seeing popular Latino singers such as salsa queen Celia Cruz and rock star Eduardo Capetillo.

No alcohol was sold at the event, but businesses that served liquor remained open and could sell drinks. Thirsty festival-goers lined up at a stand dispensing what some thought was free beer.

"Oh, it's free?" asked one man, getting in the long line. "That's the way I like my beer."

Once he found out it was nonalcoholic, he tried it anyway, sniffing the cup and giving the brew a wash in his mouth. A frown proved his discontent.

Some, such as teacher Asusena Haro, who had attended two past festivals, decided to come this year because she felt safer.

"I knew the police would straighten it out," she said.

FRANCINE ORR / Los Angeles Times

Francisco Heon, 4, of San Fernando tosses a ball during a game at Fiesta Broadway. He won a prize.

"That's why I came back this year."

Haro, 24, who said she attends the fiesta for "the music and the experience of the whole day," brought along a few visiting friends as well as co-worker Julie Tamayo. Tamayo said she heard about last year's violence but was eager to attend the event nonetheless.

"I wanted to see the Texas group La Mafia, and I knew my friends would protect me if there were any problems," she said.

Started in 1990, the festival commemorates the victory of Mexican soldiers over French troops near the town of Puebla on May 5, 1862.

Other than the five performance stages, the most crowded areas at Sunday's event were the giveaway stands where passersby picked up everything from free cereal to key chains. Police officials said they were initially worried about increased congestion because there were fewer stages than last year but just as many people watching the shows.

Once the sun peeked out in the early afternoon, the crowd grew larger and even more festive. At 7th and Hill streets, David Gonzalez hoisted his 6-year-old son, Jesus, on his back to catch a glimpse of the group Banda Hermanos Ventura. Later, at the event's main stage at Olympic Boulevard and Broadway, a moment of silence was held for slain Tex-Mex singer Selena.

Plant manager Sonko Muhammad and his friend Baks Ceesay, natives of the West African nation of Gambia, happened upon the festival as they were walking Downtown.

"I knew about Cinco de Mayo from the celebrations they have every year at the school where I work," Muhammad said. "So I wanted to check it out."

A few local shop owners were unhappy that they were unable to capitalize financially on the crowds.

"Last year our business was much better," said George Mebasseri, who owns Moda Broadway, a clothing store at 8th Street and Broadway. "Most of the people concentrate on the free stuff and aren't out here to shop."

He was pleased, however, with the presence of more police.

"I was a little scared about having a riot like we had last year," Mebasseri said. "But this year all the police officers have made a big difference."

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